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AN  
**ATTEMPT**  
TO  
ESTABLISH A NEW SYSTEM  
OF  
**MEDICAL EDUCATION,**

WITH  
A VIEW TO SUPPRESS IGNORANCE, AND PRESERVE THE  
RESPECTABILITY AND UTILITY

OF THE  
*Medical Character.*

ADDRESSED TO  
PARENTS AND GUARDIANS, THE RISING GENERATION  
OF MEDICAL STUDENTS,  
AND TO  
THE PROFESSION IN GENERAL.

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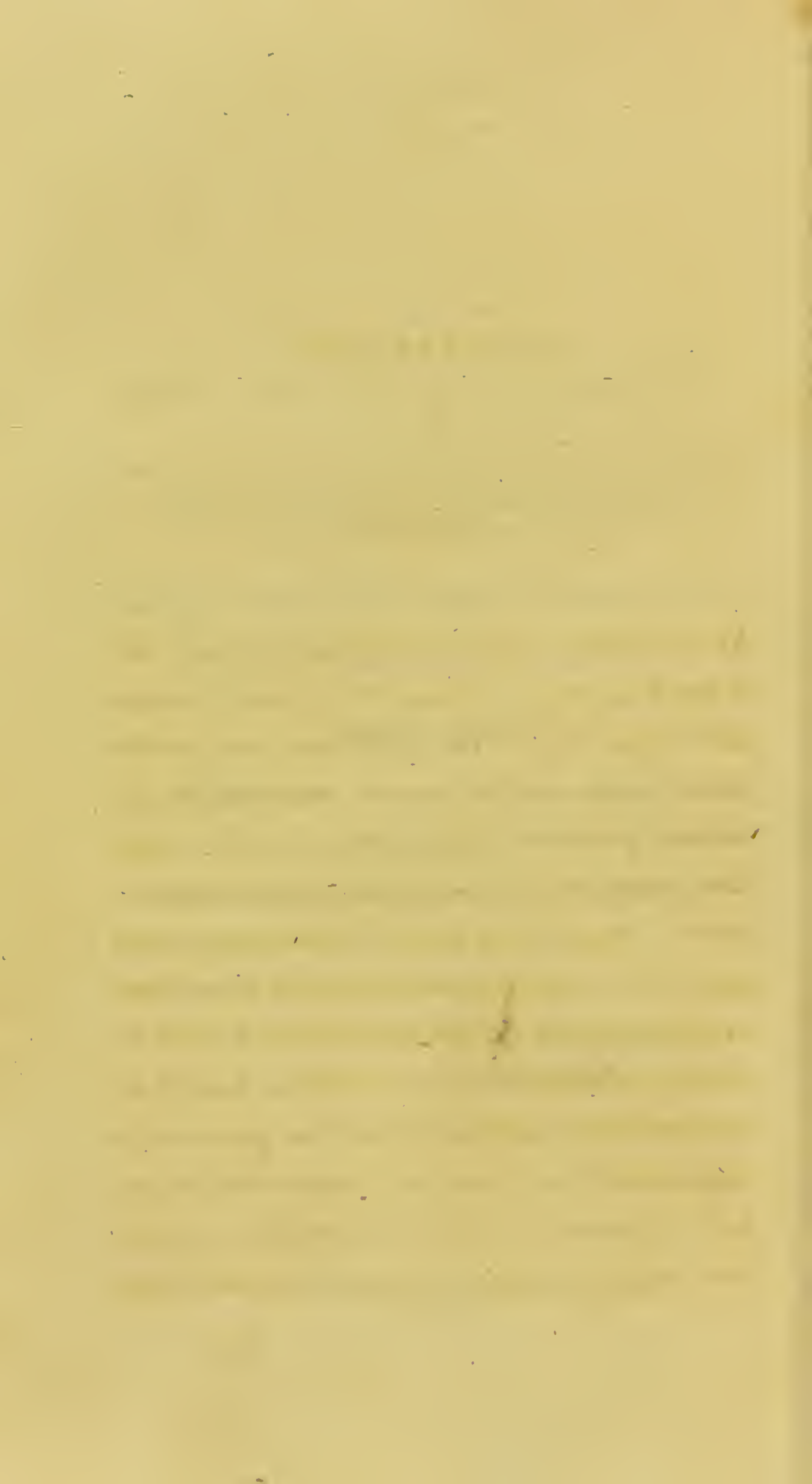
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**The Author**

ENTERTAINS OF HIS HIGH PROFESSIONAL  
CHARACTER,  
AND SPLENDID INTELLECTUAL ACQUIREMENTS.

*24, Sidmouth Street,  
Regent Square.*



## AN ATTEMPT,

*&c.*

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It is, perhaps, almost unnecessary to state, that it has long been a source of degraded feelings and regret that so many illiterate and uneducated youths should become members of this learned profession. It is, therefore, high time that some effectual method should be devised in order to suppress the growth of rank weeds, and just at this time the profession was never more resplendent with genius and talent—I mean in its higher branches; it is, therefore, a duty we owe ourselves and the public, to preserve its respectability and universally acknowledged utility. It is not my intention to allude to a chosen few, commonly called geniuses, who start up on

a sudden, and diffuse their brilliancy not only in our profession, but in every other ; for a little reading will shew that many such have attained the very summit of their profession, who laboured under every disadvantage both of fortune and education, yet they possessed industry ; and I really think nothing can be done without the proper application of industry ; I do not think talent of the slightest utility unless backed by assiduity. It must be admitted that genius is improved by education, precisely in the same manner as a diamond is worked into brilliancy by the aid of the mechanic.

“ 'Tis education forms the human mind,  
Just as the twig is bent the tree's inclin'd.”

I need scarcely be at the pains and trouble of proving the utility of this profession, as it is a fact, I hope, universally acknowledged ; but, I must say, that its utility solely depends upon the information possessed by its members. Ignorance in this profession is a curse to man-



kind, and he that professes it without a full and perfect knowledge of his art and science, is criminal in a degree.

“The prophet and the healer of disease,  
The skilful artist, and the bard inspired  
With strains that charm his hearers—these we seek,  
And these, in every climate under heav’n,  
Are dearly priz’d.”

It has been said that parents provide for their children better by giving them a good education than by giving them a stock of money. Often have I heard of wealthy parents, but very scientific, who told their children they would not give them much money, for they had experienced too much pleasure in making their own fortunes to deprive their children of the same pleasure. The late Dr. William Hunter, the uncle of the late Dr. Baillie, made this remark, or something of the same kind, to his nephew, and adhered to his word; and who, let me ask; could have been a greater honour to the profession, than the late ever-lamented Dr. Baillie?

It is a paramount duty on the part of every parent to bear in mind, that one of the most important duties they owe their children, is education. Are we not told in the sacred writings, to train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it? It is by no means an uncommon circumstance for illiterate parents to have well-informed children; and therefore the latter, submitting to parental authority, are often thrown into a situation of life for which their education has ill calculated them. That parents have a most important and most responsible duty to discharge with respect to the education of their children, none can deny. It should be recollected; that it is by no means a step of little moment in life, the finding out an eligible mode of life for a child; and if parents carelessly and inconsiderately hurry their children from school half educated, and then plunge them, as it were, into a learned profession, particularly that of medicine, without either the proper preparatory education, inclination, or talent, they have

as much to answer for as though they were endeavouring to propagate the plague. I am not anxious to inflame your minds, by stating the numerous examples of ignorance which have fallen under my own immediate observation, to say nothing of the innumerable instances which are sure to be met with in the course of a very little reading, for I am not addressing “stones, but men, and being men, it would inflame you, it would make you mad,” were I to do so; and indeed having quite enough to do in correcting my own faults, I have neither time nor inclination to blazon forth those of others, farther than I deem necessary for the respectability of my profession, and from that no power on earth will ever make me shrink. I consider every man in duty bound to struggle in a grand cause, particularly in one which is of such high importance, not only as far as it concerns the respectability of the medical man, but for the benefit of the whole world, inasmuch as ignorant medical men are as dangerous as that con-

vulsion of nature, an earthquake, to a town which may unfortunately contain them.

Had I a son, I should act in the following manner. Carefully observe youthful actions, and if symptoms of genius and ability were exhibited for any particular profession, I would educate him accordingly. If for a military life, I would have the education more of a geographical and mathematical kind than classical. If a respectable trade appeared to suit his inclination, I would not oppose him, neither would I be lenient in his education; for trades to be creditably pursued often require minds of no ordinary character. Never would I thwart him in a trade, which bid fair for success, and, merely to gratify my own pride, force him into what are dignified either of the three learned professions; for if he enters with reluctance, he will never succeed, but if confined to trade, and was determined to be honest and industrious, he probably would thrive—at any rate obtain a



respectable livelihood. I would not force him to a trade merely because I thought his chance of success in life better than in a profession. No, no, this would be indeed cruel.

If this profession, which more immediately interests us, were the object of his pursuit, I would sincerely recommend a classical education, and that, if possible, at one of our public schools. Of the advantages of this method of education I can speak from experience: a boy there acquires not only a knowledge of the classics, but every faculty of his nature appears to gain strength and energy. A knowledge of the classics, to some extent at least, is, or ought to be considered indispensable towards the formation of the medical character, notwithstanding there are many, aye, very many, who are daily entering the Profession, who know no more about their  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ ,  $\delta$ , &c. &c. &c., than a mere infant; and how parents can have the vanity, cruelty, and self-sufficiency to place their children in a learned profession so shamefully and

disgracefully deficient in the rudiments of education, has long put my ideas of a learned profession into strange confusion. I have read over pages of manuscript, known by the name of "Notes," which were taken by students during a lecture, and such they were upon my honour, and of a very unique description, that is, as far as the terms used in our profession to designate different forms of disease, and the Johnsonian English were concerned. I have somewhere read, that a student had put down the words Molishes Osham instead of Mollities Ossium, and on this subject I am not sceptical; for it is nothing in comparison to what I have seen, and the most lamentable part of the story is, that these pages of rubbish were absolutely pronounced to be the principal portion of the lecturer's discourse. Good Heavens! surely the profession are not insensible to their own degradation! Why do they quietly allow their profession to be stigmatized and ridiculed by the public, which it in reality is, and must fall into disrepute if we allow our territories to be

infringed on by such disgraceful trash. Let us pursue some method in order to prevent the chance of this most disgusting, nauseating, and loathsome contagion. I would recommend that the College of Physicians or Surgeons should ascertain the extent of a lad's scholastic abilities, whether with a view to the profession of a physician, surgeon or apothecary, and if found qualified to prosecute a learned profession, let his name be regularly listed and enrolled; moreover, he, the candidate, should obtain from his schoolmaster a written testimonial in proof of his scholastic attainments, and that the individual appointed to examine, should give him a few lessons in Celsus and Hippocrates. This may be objected to; for, by such a system, many a genius would be prevented from entering the profession. That I cannot think—for a diamond is too brilliant to be eclipsed either by a Grecian or Latinist. John Hunter was not a classic; but when digging for a diamond we shall have to clear away an immense quantity of rubbish.



This is a proposition, and I trust it will not be rejected, unless duly considered. That some method should be had recourse to, no liberal minded member of the profession can deny. Such a method would spare the dignity of the profession, and afford a test of some kind, but at present we may as well attempt to wash a negro white as make a sufficient supply of efficient members of this learned profession out of the illiterate multitude who are annually entering it.

The veterinary department are endeavouring to suppress the growth of rank weeds, and as long as Professor Coleman exists, ignorance will be discountenanced. Next to human existence what can be more beneficial to the best interests of mankind than the preservation of the lives of the horse, dog, indeed cattle of every description? The veterinary profession decidedly requires well educated youths, for its basis is the same as that of human medicine and surgery, I am very happy to perceive it in so flourishing a condition, and nothing but the suppression of



ignorance can preserve its respectability, utility, and increase in science. The following are the words of a very intelligent surgeon, Mr. Alcock:—"It is not an uncommon error for parents to remain undeterminate regarding the choice of a profession or mode of life for their children; the choice is frequently left to the children themselves, who cannot be supposed to possess the necessary information so as to enable them to determine what is really best; they therefore often select a profession from some showy and unimportant appendage to it, and never think of the evils inseparable from their choice, until it is too late to benefit by the knowledge. Were parents to determine this point early in life the mind might, by due care and cultivation, be adapted to the pursuit so as to ensure a higher degree of excellence than is usually attained."\* That this remark of Mr. Alcock's is true and judicious, all must admit: I am therefore induced to conceive that if parents

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\* Essay on Medical Education.

give their children a superior education they will much oftener form a right judgment for themselves, and consequently, not so liable to fall into this, I may almost say, universal error. I am rather at a loss to conceive which of the two is the greatest evil, viz. :—the placing a youth in a learned profession without education, talent, or inclination : or, the system of opposition where these requisites predominate ? By the former, both parent and child are rendered miserable ; and by the latter, science may be deprived of genius and talent of a most exquisite description.

I have read of instances where such opposition led to self-destruction, and of others, where aspiring genius forced its way from a tradesman's shop to the summit of a profession. I shall here relate an example of each.—A young man, of studious turn, was anxious to qualify himself for either of the learned professions—if my memory fails me not, it was for the church. His family, however, thought that under the circumstances of his situation, he would have

a better chance of success in life as a tradesman, and they took the necessary steps for placing him as an apprentice. This he looked upon as an indignity to which he was determined in no case to submit; and accordingly when he had ascertained that all opposition to the choice of his friends proved useless, he walked a distance of sixteen miles, looked about him in order to select his ground, made a pillow, laid himself down with his face looking up to the sky, and in that posture was found dead, with the appearance of having died tranquilly.—Let this act as a warning: this is only one example out of several.

The next shews the absurdity and inutility of opposing genius and talent.

The celebrated French Beclard was opposed by his parents, and they apprenticed him to an Ironmonger.—It is almost unnecessary to say that he could not rest in a situation infinitely beneath his enlightened and aspiring mind, and

was severely censured by his parents in consequence of a complaint made against him by his master. All opposition however was useless ; he was determined to follow medicine, which he did, and with extraordinary success. He followed the steps of his preceptor Bichat, obtained high reputation, and has contributed greatly to the improvement of his profession. If Beclard had been confined to trade, mankind would have been deprived of his invaluable services, and himself made wretched, and by whom ?—his own parents. But as it terminated, his happiness was preserved, and science increased.—Only reflect on the contrast.—In making these remarks, I have three grand objects in view ; the first is, to support the dignity of the medical character ; 2ndly reciprocally to promote the happiness of parent and child, by preventing them from throwing themselves into a labyrinth of difficulties, from which they would be incapable of extricating themselves, and lastly, though not least, to cherish rising genius, and strenuously oppose ignorance, in the hope that



our profession will increase in science, and decrease in numbers.

If parents will attend to these hints, I humbly conceive that their children will be like trees growing by the river side, that shall bring forth their fruits in due season.

Presuming that these preparatory requisites have been attended to, I shall proceed a step further, and consider the points necessary to be well considered, prior to becoming a medical student.

You are about to embark in an honourable and useful profession, one which decidedly claims the pre-eminence of being the first which can engage and interest the human mind ; the education you have received will prepare your mind for its study, and excite within you sensations of sublime enthusiasm ; nay, more—it will thrill you as it were with exquisite sensations. I am sure you will not be so weak as to imagine,

that a life of learning, is a life of laziness and ease. And I am still more certain that you would not enter this profession unless you were resolved to labour hard at study, and make it the delight, and the joy of your lives, according to the motto of our late Lord Chancellor, King—

“ Labor ipse voluptas.”\*

These considerations are necessary to be determined on by the rising physician, surgeon, and general practitioner; for the happiness or misery of a fellow-creature, nay, of an anxious family will depend upon all equally alike; and nothing can be more truly absurd, or more calculated to impress you with erroneous notions, than the division of the healing art into distinct branches. If the physician neglects any branch of medical study, he is like an unsound horse, liable to trip; so, in like manner, with the surgeon, accoucheur, apothecary, oculist, aurist, dentist.

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\* See *Watts on the Improvement of the Mind*.

In a work I am about to publish, I shall endeavour to expose the absurdity of educating with a view to treat the diseases of the eye, ear, &c., and shew its dangerous consequences. I shall show from the facts of anatomy that the Oculist alone is a dangerous, knavish blockhead, and a disgrace to the profession. I shall also prove the Aurist in a light equally ridiculous, and the Dentist to be of little value in a scientific point of view, unless his knowledge is founded on the general principles of medical science. That these branches of the profession should be divided in study is an idea pregnant with evil; but of the necessity of the division of labour in practise I think indispensably necessary, and I agree with Dr. Stewart.\* One may possess fortune and very favourable prospects, and after having gone through a severe course of medical study, it may better suit his talent, inclination, and convenience, to take his degree,

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\* See Remarks on the present state of the Medical Profession, shewing the necessity for the division of labour in its practise.

and become a Doctor in Medicine. A second says, I have relations who can forward my views in the surgical department, and indeed I prefer the practise of surgery to that of medicine. A third says, I had many opportunities of attending women in labour when a student, and I rather suspect this suits my inclination. A fourth says, I have little interest either with physicians, surgeons, or physician accoucheurs ; my fortune is limited ; I have no particular choice, and have a favourable opportunity of entering into partnership with a general practitioner. Another had many opportunities of treating the diseases of the eye, and therefore styles himself an Oculist ; another the teeth, Dentist ; another the ear, Aurist. These divisions of labour tend much to the general improvement of the profession, if practised by men of talent, who have gone through a general course of study ; if otherwise, it leads to disastrous results, and is degrading to science.

I shall now suppose that I am addressing students in medicine generally ; for I care not one



straw whether an M.D. is the object of pursuit, a surgeon's diploma, or any other branch, as they must all be founded upon the knowledge of the human body, the laws of the animal economy, the nature of disease, the *modus operandi* of articles derived from the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, together with the general principles of surgery; for there is a general analogy running through the various branches of medical science connecting them together, as it were, into one scheme, one design, one whole! Many a student is led to pursue the profession of a physician from a vague idea that it is the highest step in medical rank: it is true the word Doctor implies thus much. I am not prepared to discuss the merits of a physician, but must advise the student to pursue the branch his inclination naturally leads him. The great Haller, though an admirable anatomist, could not bear the sight of blood, or a person in pain, and could not operate on the living body. A man with such feeling had better prescribe for in-

ternal disease than proceed with surgical operations, as an ingenious writer expresses it “with anxious feelings.” The respectability, in my opinion depends upon the reputation and good conduct of the parties, and not from any ridiculous nominal distinction. There should be no longer distinctions of rank but such as are founded on individual superiority ; we should aid each other ; but if disunited, we shall produce nothing.

I have to entreat that you will seriously reflect on the important and responsible station you will hereafter hold in society, and how much your success will depend on yourselves ; you have many temptations to withstand, but, for Heaven’s sake, do not neglect to study your profession. Put the following question to yourselves—Can any science be of greater importance than that which I have undertaken ?

If your minds have been well tutored, you will say, If I enter this profession I shall study

for the welfare of man, the master-piece of the Almighty. What a grand reflection! I will enter it; and am determined to cultivate it with zeal; its professed object being to benefit mankind, by relieving the various accidents and diseases to which our bodily infirmities are exposed. Numberless, I can assure you, are the instances, from the earliest ages, shewing its astonishing utility in preserving the lives of individuals, eminent for their many virtues. Will not the idea of preserving the lives of your fellow-creatures, alone give energy to your minds and inspire you with zeal? The study of your profession will require with energetic force the exertions of your intellectual faculties, and all that art, ingenuity, and industry can devise, if you wish to serve your fellow-creatures; just reflect on the pains and dangers to which feeble nature is exposed; can you then do otherwise than acknowledge its importance and duly appreciate it? You must prepare yourselves to encounter exertion in the study of your profession, and if you do not enter it with spirit, for

your parents' sake, your own sake, and, what is more, mankind in general, fly from it as you would from a reptile, that would sting you to death. I can assure you, gentlemen, without these preparatory determinations, you will neither have the understanding to foresee its importance, the heart to feel the indescribable torture you will heap on others, nor the inclination to pursue with pleasure your professional studies. In London, I must admit you have many temptations to withstand, as theatres, cyder cellars, &c. &c. It is difficult for many to withstand these temptations ; but a mind well modelled, and of superior cast, basely despises the low practices and vulgarity exhibited in swearing, segar smoking, &c. ; but with respect to theatrical entertainments, I have no objection ; on the contrary, an occasional visit to witness the performances of good plays tends to beneficial results ; it is a recreation to the mind, and also instructive. Shakspeare being a world in himself, you will glean ideas from his writings connected with our profession, which escaped



not his vivid imagination and splendid genius : for instance, there is a muscle in the human body, named diaphragm ; it is the great muscle of respiration ; it is intimately connected with the mind through the medium of firm white vascular cords, called nerves ; it is in the region of this muscle that we refer all painful and pleasurable sensations of the mind ; it is in this region that the agony of grief and the pangs of disappointment are so sensibly felt. Nothing, indeed, can operate strongly on the mind, without, in some degree, disturbing the regularity of the functions of the viscera in this region ; hence in palpitation, syncope, sighing, sobbing, and convulsive laughter, which are all natural consequences of mental emotion, the heart, lungs, and diaphragm, are more or less concerned. This appeared not to escape Shakespeare ; for in his beautiful delineation of Lear's disorder, who, previous to his derangement, thus complains :—

*Lear.* Oh ! how this mother swells up toward my heart  
 Oh me ! my heart ! my rising heart.

I would rather have the student in a medical theatre than either Covent Garden or Drury Lane. But however he will soon become—

Quite weary grown  
Of all the follies of the town,  
And seeing in all public places  
The same vain fops and painted faces.

Hoping the student is determined to pursue his profession with zeal, I will take a third step.

III. When you have received a classical education, and have had time to reflect on the important duties you will have to sustain as a member of the medical profession, and are fully determined to exert yourselves, there is a tolerable certainty of success ; for industry will accomplish what to the idle and indolent appear impossibilities : a little reading will show that many, not only of our profession, but in every other situation in life, have, in consequence of well directed industry, emerged from the most abject poverty into universal celebrity ; indeed, few things are impossible to diligence, yet I am willing to admit that the various sciences con-

nected with the study of medicine may at first alarm, and in its study you will find yourselves involved in a labyrinth of difficulties ; but startle not—if you persevere and closely examine for yourselves, you will find it far less complicated than you at first imagined.

With these impressions parents may venture with safety and with great hopes of success, to apprentice you. It now becomes a matter of inquiry as to the most eligible mode of proceeding. Some are bound with a general practitioner, others to hospital surgeons, and so on. With respect to the former method, I shall not scruple to give my most candid opinion, because I think that apprentices in general are, as it were, complete conveniences to their masters ; that is, they are made to mix together jalap, rhubarb, pills, and “ all that sort of thing,”\* which a lad with one grain of

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\* “ All that sort of thing” is a very affected disgusting mode of expression, and generally made use of by fops ; it is dandy slang. I have used this expression here to shew contempt.

sense could learn in six months with the utmost facility. He is daily staring at disease without the necessary information which can alone lead to useful practical results ; I mean the science of anatomy. They serve their time, and the last year they condescend to visit the schools either of London, Edinburgh, Dublin, or Glasgow, with a view to study that which should have been the very first object of their pursuit ; they hurry through it, and their next object is to obtain a diploma. It absolutely inflames me with indignation to think that men should be so universally scattered over the earth and legally sanctioned to mutilate mankind ; for, upon my word, it is nothing but the truth, and never can be otherwise, until diplomas are with greater caution granted. That the present system of medical education is bad, no man, I think, will deny ; and I would recommend that the student on his entrance into the profession, should commence with the study of anatomy ; it is the main-spring of his future actions. It is the stepping-stone which



can alone enable him to climb the rugged hill, on the summit of which he will see its dependent sciences—physiology, or the laws of the animal economy, pathology, or doctrine of disease. He will reflect on the animal kingdoms and see the use of botany, chemistry, and pharmacy; and when he descends he will be able to say, I shall from this time feel pleasure in the study of the healing art.

If bound to a pure surgeon, as they are absurdly called, they should study pharmacy and the *modus operandi* of medicine.\* That physic is useless to a surgeon, is one of the most inconsistent, unintelligible arguments that ever was advanced. A surgeon ignorant of physic is, without exception, one of the most contemptible beings in the world. A very little time will serve to erase from your brain this erro-

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\* But, for heaven's sake, let Anatomy be the grand consideration.

neous notion. Imperfect and dangerous as the present system of medical education appears to me to be, yet I am afraid its alteration must be suggested by some high authority, or it will avail nought ; yet I conceive that a few hints relative to its improvement may not altogether be considered unworthy of notice. The following is the plan I would suggest. Six years is the time allowed for the study of this profession ; that is for a surgeon, and five for an apothecary. We all very well know that time once lost can never be regained ; it is therefore necessary that these five or six years should be turned to the best advantage. In order, therefore, to rectify the present system of medical education, I would just reverse the order of things, and instead of wasting four precious years either in useless occupation, or most egregious idleness, I would recommend as follows :—

I would ask, What are considered to be the grand desideratums necessary to the formation

of the medical character, why a knowledge of anatomy and physiology.—This will be admitted by all who retain a single portion of sense : can any system be more cruelly absurd, than commencing with the study of those sciences which are useless in the medical profession, without anatomical and physiological knowledge. They may be ornamental and useful for any other purpose, but in medicine useless and dangerous, unless through the medium of physiology. In order to rectify this evil, I should proceed thus:—I would make my son serve the first two years of his time under the immediate superintendence of some teacher or practitioner in the neighbourhood of some school of anatomy ; if to an anatomical teacher, I should prefer, as he would be then in a fair way of putting himself in the possession of the science, which is universally admitted to be the main spring of this profession, and doubtless it is ; for without it we practice in the dark, and cannot even catch the smallest glimpse of light to our assistance ; if to a medical teacher or general

practitioner, I would wish that they would simply direct his studies, and attend to his morals, and the former not to encumber his mind with his lectures, or the latter with dispensing; I would desire that he should attend lectures on Anatomy, Physiology, Midwifery, and study the terms used in medical science generally, so that he may not be at a loss to understand the discourses and demonstrations of his teacher. Let me be understood: my son, is merely a nominal apprentice, but instead of serving the greater portion of his time in idleness, he is improving in Anatomy, &c. This I should keep him to for two years, after which he should either return to his master, whether in town or country, or to some dispensary, as circumstances may arise, and be kept similarly engaged in cultivating Botany, Chemistry and Pharmacy; he will now begin to make the latter sciences applicable to some useful purpose; he will moreover be useful to his master; he will profit from bleeding, and other minor operations. He will



also be able to attend midwifery cases; and understand its principles; in fact, he will take a pleasure in his profession, improve himself, benefit in some degree those who may fall under his master's care, and thus would all parties be accommodated.—How great a contrast. This I would keep him employed at for two years, and would for the remaining two send him to the usual schools to complete his education by attending lectures on Anatomy, Physiology, Pathology, walk the hospitals, and also lectures on Botany, Chemistry, Practice of Physic, Pharmacy and Surgery. He would then present himself for the usual examinations, and be prepared to start as a candidate for public favour, and doubtless would prove an honour to his profession, either as a Physician, Surgeon, Accoucheur, or the three gentlemen at once.

FINIS.

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